

## A CONVERSATION WITH JULIE KRAMER

### Do you have a special enemy named Susan?

No, *Stalking Susan* is not a tale of personal revenge, and I apologize to the Susans out there. I was inspired by two cold cases I covered as a WCCO-TV journalist a decade ago. They involved two women in Saint Paul, both named Susan, strangled on the same day, two years apart. When I sat down to write a novel I first created my character, Riley Spartz, but then needed an adventure for her. Somehow the Susan story came to mind.

### How would you describe *Stalking Susan* to someone you met on the street?

It's a cross between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Oh! Susannah*. Seriously, I hate simplifying things like that. I think *Stalking Susan* takes readers inside the desperate world of TV news in a classic serial killer thriller that involves the Bible, the calendar, and a smart heroine pitted against a smart antihero.

### Did you know who the killer was when you started writing your book?

No, I sort of made it up as I went along. For awhile I wanted to come up with a believable scenario in which Nick Garnett was the killer.

But I also believed for justice to prevail, the killer needed to die. I grew too fond of Nick to kill him off, and I also wanted to keep him around in case there was a sequel. He seemed like a character with a lot of potential.

### What was your writing process like for *Stalking Susan*?

Solitary. Very few people knew I was writing a book until it sold. My kids knew because I kept kicking them off the computer. I kept quiet about it because I have a large extended family (seven siblings), and I didn't want them constantly asking me what page I was on. Now they all want to be in my next book, and that creates its own problems.

### What advice do you have for other aspiring writers?

Never give all the characters the same name. That was a major pain. Also, you can go farther than you think in your storytelling. Remember that truth is stranger than fiction.

### How does being a Minnesotan inform your writing?

My books are based in Minnesota and include real life locations and references to real life news events. I think that makes the fiction

seem more real. In fact, I've had people tell me that they've lived in the state their whole lives and don't remember the big explosion on the iron range. That's when I remind them that *Stalking Susan* is a novel, and that 98% of the story is made up.

### What is your biggest dream regarding your writing?

To be able to support my family with my books. People assume that because you published a book you're in the same league as John Sandford and Vince Flynn. Just because you're with a big publisher doesn't mean the limo pulls up. In most cases, your spouse is the limo.



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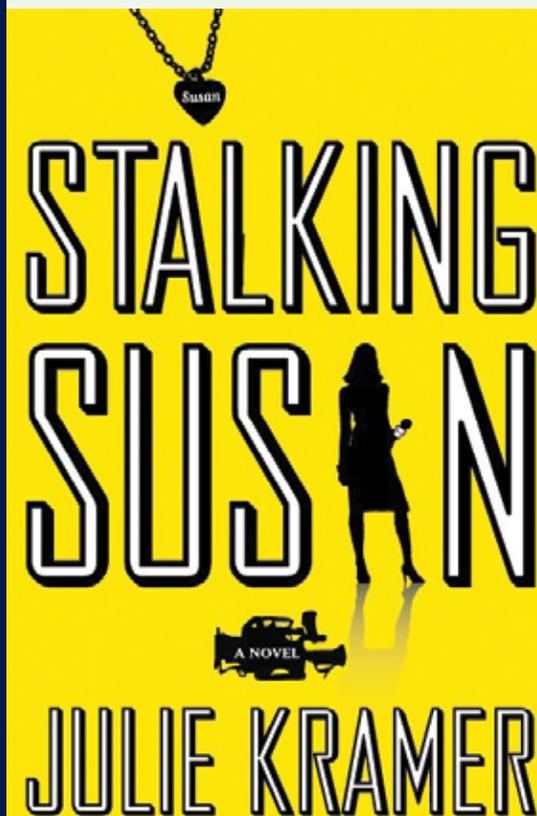
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*Stalking Susan*

by Julie Kramer

DOUBLEDAY/THE DOUBLEDAY PUBLISHING GROUP

# Stalking Susan



The author in the WCCO-TV newsroom.

Photo by Liz Zilka

## SUMMARY:

Twin Cities investigative television reporter Riley Spartz discovers that a serial killer is targeting women named Susan, and is killing one on the same day each year. In her attempt to crack the case, Spartz goes up against an uncooperative news director and a politician who fears a serial killer story will hurt Minneapolis' convention business.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What surprises did you experience in reading *Stalking Susan*?
3. Why did the author choose a pet cremation scam as one of the subplots?
4. Does the book's portrayal of newsroom life give you more sympathy for reporters or a certain level of distrust?
5. How would your experience of reading *Stalking Susan* been different if it was written in third person rather than first person? Why do you think the author chose a first person voice?
6. One of the story's underlying themes is how grief changes people. How does the loss experienced by Riley Spartz, the families of the dead Susans, and Dr. Brent Redding affect their motivations and actions?
7. What techniques did the author use to keep each of the Susans distinctive? Did you find it easy or challenging to keep the Susans straight?
8. Describe the strengths and challenges of Riley and Nick Garnett's relationship. What would you like their future to be?

9. At what point in the book did you figure out the identity of the killer? What clues are given?
10. What are the elements that make a really good mystery, and to what extent are they used in *Stalking Susan*?

## About Julie Kramer:

*Julie Kramer is a freelance news producer for NBC's "Today Show," "Nightly News," and "Dateline." Prior to that she was an award-winning investigative reporter for WCCO-TV in Minneapolis. Julie grew up along the Minnesota-Iowa state line, the fourth generation of a family who raised cattle and corn for 130 years. Her favorite childhood days were spent waiting for the bookmobile to bring her another Phyllis A. Whitney novel. Julie lives in White Bear Lake with her husband and two sons. The sequel to her first book, Stalking Susan, has been published:*

Missing Mark, 2009

For additional information about the author and her work, visit [www.juliekramerbooks.com](http://www.juliekramerbooks.com).



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